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ABSTRACT OF THE INVENTION

An inflatable curtain having an inflatable portion and a non-inflatable portion is disclosed. First and second stiffening elements are positioned along the upper edge of the inflatable curtain. The inflatable curtain is adapted to be stored within an interior portion of a vehicle prior to inflation. The vehicle has a roof at its highest point, and a housing within the vehicle and close to the roof defines an internal recess that accommodates the inflatable curtain. A side impact of a magnitude greater than a predetermined threshold value is sensed by a sensor mechanism within the vehicle, which then provides an electrical signal to an inflator which is in fluid communication with the inflatable portion of the inflatable curtain. The electrical signal causes the inflator to be actuated in a known manner. The inflator discharges fluid under pressure into the inflatable portion of the inflatable curtain. Shortly after the inflator discharges, the housing opens and the inflatable curtain inflates away from the roof. The first and second stiffening elements provide column support to the inflatable curtain during inflation and reduce the amount of time it takes for the inflatable curtain to become fully inflated.

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